Chapter 6
Turning Marketing Students into Active Citizens: The Learning of Consumption and Social–Related Marketing in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the learning of consumption and marketing within the context of social-related issues. The objectives are to expand dimensions of marketing education into a wider perspective beyond the economic focus to the social domain. Exploring the different contexts can help uncover a deeper perspective beyond general concepts of consumption and marketing. Moreover, considering the social aspect can enhance a longer perspective of business beyond current profit maximization, particularly in the 21st century with its emphasis on sustainability. The learning process can follow the four main steps of understanding the problem, introducing the solution, engaging participation (with real actions to support the project or organization), and evaluating output and outcome. These processes are elaborated together with examples of real practices and summarized learning derived from the classes conducted in Thailand. Not only can this benefit the students, but also the overall business and the society by turning marketing students into active citizens.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century demands people who can understand and manage the balance of people, planet, and profit realities. To create business people who have a good grounding in understanding beyond business knowledge to appreciate cultural literacy, ethics, analytics, and sustainability, it is better to begin early with education. With today’s focus on more collaborative efforts, it is crucial to develop people who can become active citizens. For business school students, this means their contribution not only in donating allocated profits (aka philanthropy), but also incorporating social development into their everyday
practices. Furthermore, society has recognized the need and called for action from the business sector to take part in improving social conditions.

“Consumption and Marketing” is the subject fundamental to most businesses, particularly marketing, since it involves analysis of consumer behavior and its implications for developing marketing strategies. Overall, the topic includes how to explore and interpret consumer psychology, sociocultural influences, and consumer decision-making. With its essence of understanding relevant groups and delivering values matching their demands, this subject of Consumption and Marketing is in fact applicable to many other contexts such as international relations, technological advancement, and social development. For instance, many countries have been focusing on acquiring soft power through the promotion of cultural values, entertainment, or commercializing products and services in other countries. This concept is based on the ability to influence others by way of cooperating rather than the traditional coercion (aka hard power) (Nye, 2004). Thus, understanding Consumption and Marketing is central to the programs. Another example is the technological advancement of alternative energy, which relates to the way in which people consume and save energy as well as success of marketing efforts in breaking into the dominant fossil fuel market. For social development, Consumption and Marketing can be utilized to stimulate changes in people’s behaviors, for instance, bike riding and recycling to reduce global warming.

Realizing the importance of Consumption and Marketing and its implications in different contexts, this chapter aims to connect the subject to the goal of developing business school students who seek to generate meaningful initiatives beyond achieving business profits to creating real benefits to society. Particularly, the chapter features summarized concepts of how to organize the learning and engage students’ participation in social development projects. Based on the classes conducted in Thailand, where active citizenship has become a principle concern, this specific case approach demonstrates both overview perspectives of Consumption and Social-related Marketing and example practices related to the country’s contextual situations.

CONSUMPTION AND MARKETING IN SUPPORT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social development refers to the need to put people first in attaining sustainable growth and a better quality of life. With its central role to address complex relationships between societies, states and communities, social development requires collective efforts of all stakeholders where all can contribute according to their interests and capabilities. In the past, the business sector was generally viewed as the source of donations since business operations tended to be disconnected from social development activities. Therefore, their allocated resources were mainly contributions, in cash or in kind. In the early days, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) began with the goal of upholding ethical practices in managing business and later extended to the acquisition of resources and production of products and services with considerations of public benefit. Table 1 explains the development of CSR. Over time the practice has become integral to the corporate strategy. Therefore, it is evident that more businesses are now organizing their own initiatives to support social development while there has been increased use of business knowledge in a variety of social development projects.

Consumption and Marketing is one of the areas in business practice that can directly yield benefits in support of social development. The subject involves an interrelated relationship between analyses of consumption behaviors and development of marketing to satisfy the needs, wants, demands, or desires of target consumers and hence produce returns (e.g. sales, profits). The focused topics include understanding
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